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ABSTRACT

The statewide implementation of the Georgia State Board of Education (GSBE) policy for high school graduation requirements was begun in September, 1980. It specifically stated that the GSBE would be responsible for assessing the basic skills, or learner skills, of students enrolled in public schools. It further stated that each local school system was responsible for certifying the student competent in four additional life role areas, the producer, the consumer, the citizen and the individual. Students will be required to pass the Georgia Basic Skills Test to demonstrate competency as a learner and will be required additionally to demonstrate competency in the four life role areas. This requires each local school system to establish and approve the performance objectives for each life role area, develop assessment instructions to measure these objectives, and develop remediation programs. A bank of items (n=1450) was made available to school systems to use as a base pool in developing their own item bank. In the Life Role Skills Lab Project, materials for remediation were developed and implemented under a pilot test and evaluation design geared to the criteria for state validation. (PN)

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THE LIFE ROLE SKILLS LABORATORY PROJECT: AN LEA CONSORTIUM EFFORT IN GEORGIA TO DEVELOP INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES IN FOUR LIFE ROLE AREAS

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THE LIFE ROLE SKILLS LABORATORY PROJECT: AN LEA CONSORTIUM EFFORT IN GEORGIA TO DEVELOP INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES IN FOUR LIFE ROLE AREAS

Perspective

For over a decade state education agencies have been involved in the development and implementation of state level student testing programs. Their stated purpose has been to improve student performance and instructional delivery through an assessment program. With the added pressure of accountability minimum competencies for high school graduation became the concern of many State Agencies, State Legislatures and Boards of Education. Assessment was seen as the vehicle for determining these minimum competencies of students. In most cases there were no tests available that were valid and reliable for the purpose.

In the rush to strengthen the total educational program from the state level and to develop the needed assessment instruments as quickly as possible, many problems that would confront local school systems were not foreseen. These surfaced as the mandates and policies were implemented. For example, the task of developing remedial programs and procedures with supporting materials fell primarly on the local system. Such problems can be left to the local school systems to solve themselves, or they can be resolved jointly, with the state agency providing the leadership, developmental/technical assistance, and support to the local school system in solving the problems. The latter approach can be very effective and cost efficient when many systems join together to use their expertise and resources to tackle a problem common to all of them.

Background

The Georgia Department of Education established the background for competency-based high school graduation requirements in the late 60's. An Advisory Commission on Educational Goals was appointed by the State Board of Education in 1969. Its purpose was to determine the goals for education that would include student knowledge, skills and values considered necessary for living successfully in the future.

The Commission presented a set of "Product Goals" that should represent the outcomes of public education. These were adopted by the State Board of Education in 1970. In the following year a statewide student assessment program was implemented to measure student learning in reading, language, and mathematics. This program assessed students in grades 4, 8, and 11 with norm referenced tests.

In 1972, the Atlanta Assessment project was funded to turn the Product Goals into measurable performance objectives. This effort included the development and validation of instruments to assess these objectives. The 1974 Georgia General Assembly established the Adequate Program of Education in Georgia Act (APEG). This act mandated statewide assessment of student learning at a minimum of three grade levels. The act also mandated a comprehensive educational program at the high school level that would prepare students for adulthood, employment, and/or further schooling. An extensive review of high school achievement and graduation requirements of local school systems in this state and many other states was conducted by the State Board of Education between 1974 and 1976.

Most significantly, three criterion referenced tests in Reading, Mathematics, and Career Development were developed and, since 1976, have been administered to all students in grades 4 and 8. Since 1978, Reading and Mathematics tests have been administered to all students in grade 10. In late 1976, the State Board of Education adopted a policy which established requirements for high school graduation and mandated changes in the operation of programs at the school level. The new requirements were an outgrowth of a statewide concern for the quality of the secondary program. Educators, parents, the public, business and industry had voiced this concern. The policy was an attempt to provide guidelines and criteria for addressing the perceived problems of the secondary program. It addressed attendance, Carnegie Units, and competencies.

The plan for implementation of the policy called for a field-test of the new graduation requirements before statewide application. To accomplish the field test, in late 1977, ten geographically distributed pilot school districts were awarded grants of $25,000 a year for three consecutive years to develop and/or revise program instruction and support services to enable students to meet the new minimum graduation requirements. During 1980 to 1982, smaller grants were given to many school systems to assist them in making the necessary modifications to implement the State Board Policy.

As a result of the field-test, the State Board policy was amended in 1978 and 1980. The State Board policy mandated that local school systems implement the new high school graduation requirements. It specifically stated that the Georgia Department of Education would be responsible for assessing the basic skills, or Learner Skills, of students enrolled in public schools. It further stated that each local school system was responsible for certifying the student competent in four additional "life role areas", the Producer, the Consummer, the Citizen, and the Individual. This included:

1. defining performance objectives for each life role area according to local standards;

2. assessing student accomplishment of these objectives; and

3. establishing minimum levels of performance for graduation from high school with a diploma.

Since no additional funding was coupled to this mandate, local school systems had to organize their existing resources to carry out these responsibilities. New tasks ranged from modifications of the curriculum to additional support services and increased record keeping.

The statewide implementation of the State Board policy for high school graduation requirements was begun in September of 1980. Students who entered high school as freshmen in September of 1981 and thereafter, will be required to pass the Georgia Basic Skills Tests to demonstrate competency as a learner. Students who entered high school as freshmen in 1982, and thereafter, will be required additionally to demonstrate competency in the other four life role areas.

Problem

The State Board policy placed the responsibility of the assessment of students in four life role areas on the local school system. In addition, systems are responsible for remediation of those students who do not meet minimum levels of competency. This requires each local school system to establish and approve the performance objectives for each life role area, develop assessment instruments to measure these objectives, and develop remediation programs.

Except for a few commercial tests and remedial materials that might apply to a few objectives, almost nothing could be found to meet local needs, least of all a system for addressing all four life role areas together. However, the development of assessment instruments and remedial activities is a sizable undertaking even for large school systems with adequate or better resources. In Georgia, most school systems are small and medium sized rural systems with limited resources.

Improvement Efforts

In an effort to respond to the assessment problem, a project was funded in September of 1981, in Laurens County, to develop a bank of assessment items for the four life role skills areas.

The project staff collected the life role objectives from 137 school systems in the state. Content experts in particular life role areas were then trained in procedures needed to select and clarify good performance objectives. These individuals were divided into four committees, one for each life role area. Then these committees screened the submitted objectives, modified some and developed additional ones. These were all then reviewed by measurement experts and rewritten in a consistant format. The final product consisted of 61 performance objectives distributed across four life role areas. These objectives were the basis for determining the test items to be included in the item bank.

The intent of the project from the beginning was not to develop test items but rather to collect test items already in the public domain or those already developed by some school systems in Georgia. Again the project staff were trained in the techniques of test item construction and selection. All collected test items were then examined by these four committees, items were selected, some were modified, and a pool of 1,600 items was generated with approximately 25 items per objective.

In order to determine how these test items performed with all types of students across the state, a field-test was developed and implemented according to the following design.

1. Development of 16 tests of 100 items each that measured all four life role areas:

2. A stratified field-test matrix design across 24 school systems that represented the north, middle, and south sections of the state and included small, middle, and large school systems from each section. Size was determined by ADA:

3. In each school system 40 students at each grade level, 9 through 12, were selected by ramdom sample and tested. In addition, up to 24 handicapped students (as available) were also tested in each school system.

After the field test the data were analyzed and criteria developed relating to item difficulty. The test items were reviewed against these criteria and accepted or rejected from the pool. Approximately 1,450 test items remained in the pool after this process. These were printed and packaged with a user's manual and made available to other school systems in the state who were willing to pay for the cost of printing ($200) and also identify a person to be trained in the use of the item bank. Some 60 school systems in the state are now using the item bank. School systems were encouraged to use the item bank as a base pool and to expand the pool through local efforts particularly in areas where they had other performance objectives that did not match those of the item bank.

Life Role Skills Lab Project

The responsibility for remediation caused many systems to be concerned. Repetition of courses including life role skills could keep a student from graduating. In addition, very few commercial materials were available and funds for purchasing them were extremely limited.

In order to respond to the remediation problem, an improvement effort was designed at the state level and shared with selected local school system staff who had both an interest and experience in improvement activities. These systems agreed to develop a set of remedial activities for each performance objective in the Life Role Skill areas in the item bank package. Everyone agreed that cooperation among many school systems was the most effective cost efficient way to solve the remediation problem statewide.

All of the participating school systems came into this effort with a full understanding of the following constraints:

1. There were no special developmental funds to support this effort.

2. Each participating school system would accept a pro rata share of the work as well as their share of any costs incurred.

3. An evaluation design would be developed for the effort that would meet the criteria for state validation (IVD Process).

4. If validated, the materials would be shared with other interested school systems in the state for the cost of printing.

The 12 participating school systems ranged from small to large, rural to urban, and were geographically distributed across the state. (See Figure 1) In order to maximize resources, four Georgia Training Centers for Educational Improvement whose content areas target on these Life Role Skills were brought into the improvement effort to provide staff expertise and materials.

A steering committee from the participating local school systems was formed to organize the effort and plan the tasks to be accomplished. The following tasks were outlined.

1. Dissect the broad performance objectives into specific components with multiple descriptors;

2. Agree on format and structure of activities;

3. Define constraints on development of activities;

4. Agree on a management system for the lab;

5. Determine which activities would be developed by the Training Centers and which ones would be developed by each local school system;

6. Set a timeline for development and review by group; and

7. Develop a User's Manual.

To accomplish these tasks, the participating personnel were divided into four work groups, one for each life role area. Each group had at least one content person from a Training Center and three or more curriculum specialists. A few of these individuals had participated in developing the objectives for the item bank. All agreed on the criteria imposed on the remedial activities:

1. They must be self instructional;

2. They would include use of reference resources readily available in any school or library and would use no films or audio-visual materials;

3. Reading level was to be fifth grade level or below; and

4. An evaluation section would be the last component of each activity with at least 10 test items and a self scoring answer key. Where possible, these test items were to be multiple choice like those in the item bank.

After development and revision the activities were printed and distributed to the participating school systems. A management system was developed that would take the student from diagnosed weakness through the appropriate outside assessment drawn from the item bank. This system would assure that a student was using instructional activities that were in the area of diagnosed deficiencies. It would provide for recording the completion of the activities and the accompanying self assessment, as well as recording the data from the additional assessment drawn from the item bank. If minimum competency at the life role level had still not been attained, the student would be recycled. The lab activities would be housed in a Library, Media Center, Reading Lab or other appropriate place most accessable in each local system. Use of the lab and availability would vary by school system with students using it before school, during study hall or lunch, after school, and even during the summer.

The implementation phase of the project is two-fold. Materials are to be piloted by the school systems from February to June 1983. Based on the analysis of data collected, the activities are to be revised in the summer of 1983, printed, implemented, and evaluated according to the following objectives and procedures:

Objectives

1. Differences in Life Role test scores for students certified as competent and those certified as non-competent will be significantly reduced as a result of remediation.

2. Significant reductions will be found in the proportion of students judged to be not competent on all Life Role tests before and after completion of the remedial lab.

3. The proportion of all students assessed in a district failing to meet criteria for Life Role competence will be 5% or less following the full set of remediation cycles.

Data Collection

1. Administer tests for each of the four Life Roles to all students.

2. Identify students meeting and failing to meet the certification criteria specified in the Item Bank User's Manual (60%).

3. Develop a competency profile at the objectives level for students failing to meet certification criteria.

4. Remedy identified deficiencies using the lab activities.

5. Administer equivalent Life Role tests for students completing the lab activities. (100 test items)

6. Collect 8th grade state criterion-referenced test scores for all students.

All data will be collected and analyzed at four Life Role levels (producer, consumer, individual and citizen).

Evaluation Design

The evaluation design for objectives 1 and 2 can be depicted as follows:

O_1

O_1 X_R O_2

O_1 is achievement on the Life Role competency test as described in data collection Step #1 above.

X_R is participation in the remediation activities

O_2 is achievement on the Life Role test as described in Step #5, etc.

For objective 2, the design is as follows:

P_1 X_R P_2

P_1 is the proportion of students who are not certified as competent in Step #1 above.

X_R is the remediation activities.

P_2 is the proportion of students who are not certified as competent after the first remediation cycle, etc.

For objective 3, the design is as follows:

X_R O_1

X_R is all remediation activities

O_1 is the proportion of the student population identified as not competent.

Some real problems occurred in working out an agreement with the 12 local school systems concerning the evaluation design. There will be multiple cycles of remediation for some individual students. Multiple tests, therefore, will need to be assembled and administered. Once on their own, each school system will have the responsibility to establish its own cut-off score. But for the purposes of validation a common score across all 12 systems was needed in the evaluation design. In solving these problems, a single attitude was expressed by all. "Providing these remedial activities for students is our top priorty. However, the next most important thing we do is to validate their effectiveness." A key element to the success of project validation is the involvement of the evaluator specalists from the very beginning. They should be a part of the planning and organization of tasks for the project. With the evaluation specialists involved from the onset, the project design then includes sound evaluation techniques that are feasible within the total structure of the project.

Evaluation specialists working with State Department staff provide an important supportive team to local school systems carrying out improvement efforts.

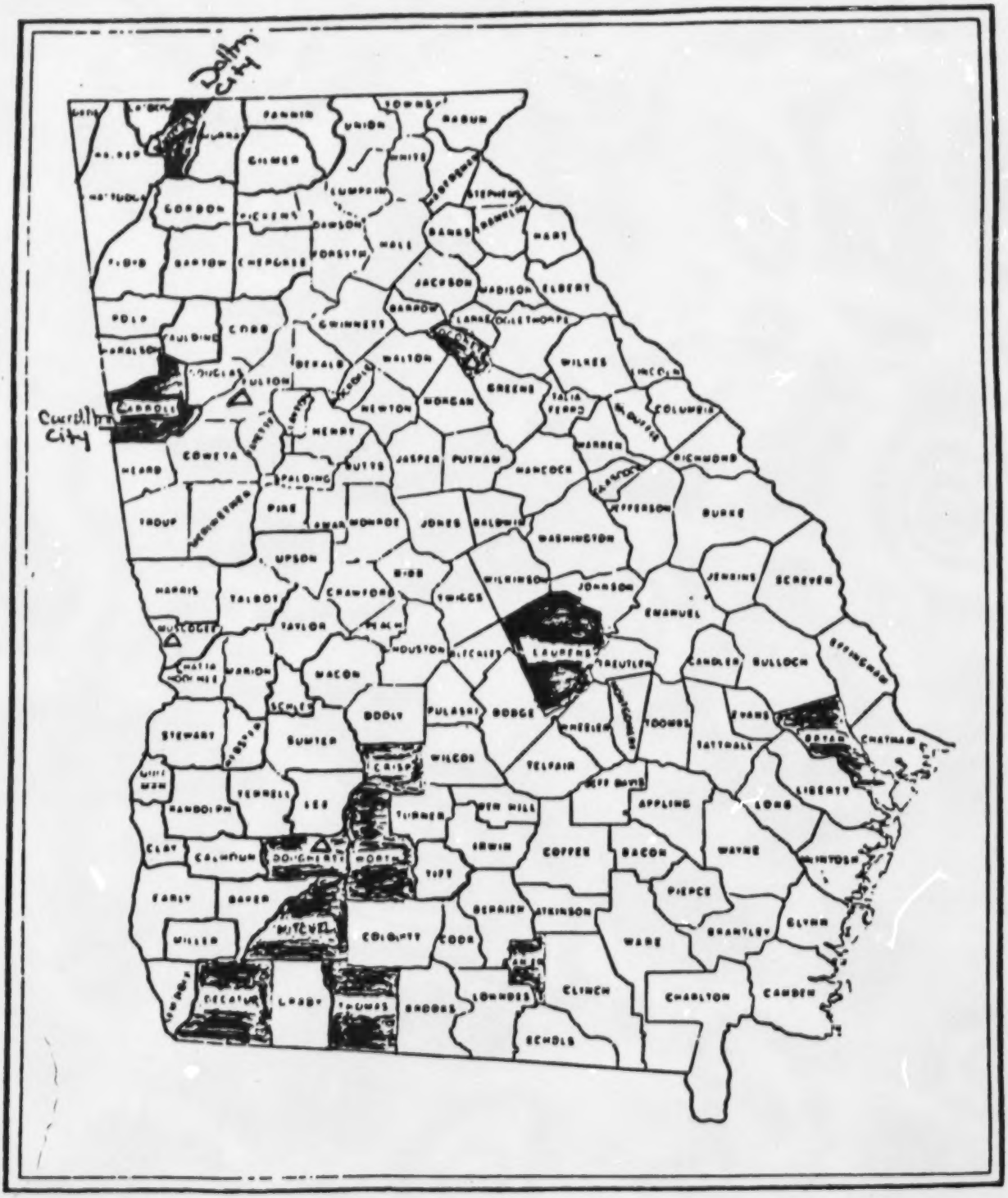
Once validated the activities will be disseminated to other school systems in the state under the Network of Georgia Training Centers for Educational Improvement. This will require a unique design with the 12 local school system sites functioning as a part of one overall Training Center. Such a design would provide an operational site within 75 to 100 miles of any other school system in the state. Thus, any interested school system in the state could visit a Training Center site to observe the lab in operation with a minimal investment of two hours or less driving time. They would be able to adopt the lab with minimal training, a half a day, and by paying the printing cost for a complete set of remedial activities and support materials, the record card and the User's Manual.

Significance of Effort

The significance of the effort is twofold. First, a statewide problem has been addressed. The project has met a need that local school systems have as a result of a State Board Policy that requires assessment and remediation of students in four life role areas. Materials for remediation were developed and implemented under a pilot test and evaluation design geared to criteria for state validation (IVD). Second, a state cross-section of 12 participating school systems and four Training Centers have accomplished a sizable, difficult task through a cooperative effort with no additional central funding source. This has been a local system effort, utilizing the expertise of local school staff to a degree and with an effect seldom seen in statewide efforts. In a time of recession, State Department and University personnel have assumed supportive roles. The results are timely in that the remedial activities are available for the first group of students to be affected by the new Board Policy. Although this effort has required additional work on the part of personnel from the participating local school systems and Training Centers, all undertook the effort intending the product to be shared, after validation, with other school systems in the state.

This particular effort is well underway and will soon be completed. The concept of cooperation, however, may have the greatest long range impact. It can and will be used again to meet needs that are common to the majority of school systems in the State. This concept allows the function of educational improvement at the state level to remain viable and effective in providing assistance to local school systems to meet priority needs through innovative efforts.

LIFE ROLE SKILLS LAB PROJECT
LEA CONSORTIUM IN GEORGIA



△ TRAINING CENTERS FOR EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

■ SHADED AREAS ARE PARTICIPATING SCHOOL SYSTEMS (LEA)